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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [ETRD](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: SOME POSITIVE CHANGES TO NABLUS ACCESS AND
MOVEMENT REMAIN FOLLOWING EID AL-ADHA

REF: TEL AVIV 2744

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Since the GOI's announcement of eased access and movement restrictions for the Eid al-Adha holiday (reftel), Nablus businessmen say the most important change has been that permits are no longer required for private vehicles and pedestrians to enter Nablus via Beit Iba and Huwarra checkpoints. In addition, businessmen are pleased that commercial vehicles exiting Nablus to the south, through Awarta, need no longer transfer cargoes back-to-back or have permits to cross the checkpoint. Business contacts claim that the hours at a number of checkpoints have been extended. Nablus Chamber of Commerce members credit the checkpoint upgrades to U.S. and international pressure on the GOI, but say the changes are only "minor improvements" to what they still call the "siege" of the city. End Summary.

Some Easing of Restrictions Still in Effect

¶2. (SBU) On December 18, EconOff visited Nablus area checkpoints and met with USAID contractors and local businessmen to verify changes in access and movement restrictions in and around Nablus following the Eid al-Adha holiday in the second week of December. Some of the changes announced for Eid (including access to Nablus for Arab Israelis, and permission for males 50 and older to exit without a permit) are no longer in effect. However, some procedural changes remain in place.

¶3. (SBU) Nablus businessmen told EconOff that the most important change is that permits for personal vehicles and pedestrians are no longer required when entering Nablus through Huwarra and Beit Iba checkpoints. However, vehicles that enter without a permit must take a longer way out of the city, through Asira as-Shamalia to the north. They also noted that commercial vehicles passing through Nablus' southern commercial checkpoint (Awarta) are no longer required to perform back-to-back transfers and do not need permits. EconOff and USAID contractors visited all three checkpoints and verified these changes on December 18.

Other Checkpoint Changes

¶4. (SBU) EconOff and USAID contractors also verified the following changes at Nablus area checkpoints:

-- Huwarra (main checkpoint south of Nablus for POVs and pedestrians): There is an expanded pedestrian area, a second pedestrian checkpoint lane, and an expanded parking space for taxis.

-- Awarta (checkpoint south of Nablus for commercial/VIP vehicles): VIPs can exit if they are using their own vehicle and possess the necessary permit. On December 18, EconOff monitored VIPs passing through Awarta with an average wait time of a minute each.

-- Beit Furik (checkpoint east of Nablus that connects the city to local villages): Pedestrian traffic has been halted, but vehicle traffic moves freely in both directions between Nablus and the neighboring villages of Beit Furik and Beit Dajan. Given the changes, there are no longer taxis parked on either side of the checkpoint waiting for passengers. Palestinian-registered vehicles, however, remain prohibited from traveling south toward Ramallah.

-- Beit Iba (main checkpoint for commercial and private vehicles, and pedestrian traffic to the west of Nablus and the main commercial route toward Israel): No change other than the fact that permits are no longer required to enter Nablus.

An "Improvement, Not a Solution"

14. (SBU) Despite the recent changes, Nablus businessmen report the checkpoint regime around the city remains an acute source of contention. One rhetorically asked how he could celebrate the upgrades at Huwarra when such "improvements" suggest GOI intentions to maintain the checkpoint indefinitely. Other businessmen expressed confusion at some of the new changes, questioning why the GOI no longer requires permits for commercial vehicles at Awarta but

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continues to do so at Beit Iba, and why Arab Israelis were only allowed into Nablus during the Eid. Our contacts consistently claim that the city's population and economy are shrinking as people and businesses move to surrounding areas that enjoy better access to the rest of the West Bank.
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